

Good Start, Now Get to Goal — Lessons Learned from California's Duals Demonstration

Perspectives on Aging with Dignity • August 2016



Bruce Chernof, MD, is President and CEO of The SCAN Foundation, dedicated to creating a society where older adults can access health and supportive services of their choosing to meet their needs. The Perspectives Series provides opinions and observations about transforming the way in which we age. Follow Dr. Bruce on Twitter [@DrBruce_TSF](https://twitter.com/DrBruce_TSF).

As California's Medicare-Medicaid demonstration becomes more established, a clearer picture is emerging about its early positive impact on beneficiary lives as well as areas where more work is needed. Over the last 18 months, Field Research Corporation polled over 5,000 respondents to explore the experiences of dual eligible individuals who chose to participate in the demonstration compared to those who chose to keep their Medicare the same. Complementing this critical polling, researchers at UC San Francisco's Community Living Policy Center and UC Berkeley's Health Research for Action Center released three additional bodies of work. First, they completed in-depth interviews with providers from health plans, health systems, and community-based providers. They convened over a dozen focus groups, including hard-to-reach participants. Finally, they completed the first round of an extensive survey of more than 2,100 dual eligibles in California. Taken together, this rich body of work presents both beneficiary and provider perspectives.

What are they telling us? Here are some of the positive impacts to date:

- Demonstration participants have high levels of satisfaction, which continues to increase with each successive inquiry.
- Participants' access to care is improving, particularly for medical services (e.g., medication, equipment, vision and dental benefits).
- Care coordination is having meaningful effects in participants' day-to-day lives. They are more likely to have a care coordinator compared to fee-for-service beneficiaries, and hence have better knowledge about the full range of benefits and are more likely to have problems resolved.

- Health plans are working to coordinate medical and supportive services – about 25 percent of participants reported that their health plan had done something to make it safer or easier for them to live in their home (e.g., home modifications, transportation, additional help at home).

While these successes are laudable and promising, the polling and interviews also point to important areas where significant work remains for state officials and health plans.

For the state:

- Informing dual eligible individuals about participating in the demonstration needs to improve rapidly and go beyond the legally required information letter. The potential benefits and value of participating should be explained clearly, and complemented by tools and resources to help people make more informed decisions.
- Doctors and other providers are important information sources for people deciding to participate. These trusted sources also need better information and engagement so their patients can gain access to the range of services that best meet their person-centered needs.
- Individual assessments should be more standardized and quality oversight needs further development. The demonstration must be continually refined to be responsive to participants' emerging needs.

For the health plans:

- Many members still need active engagement with a care coordinator. Half of participants without a care coordinator did not know this benefit existed and the most high-risk members were not more likely to have it. This suggests a need to renew efforts at risk stratification and active outreach.
- More needs to be done to fully coordinate with community-based services. While participants reported significantly less unmet need than those in non-demonstration counties, the rates are still high—43 percent of members with functional limitations still report having unmet needs. Health plans are clearly making headway and yet efforts need to be redoubled here.

The take home message: Good start, but we need to get to the goal. Demonstrations of this scale are uncommon and the commitment of all involved to “getting this right” is clearly evident to those who are participating. Taken together, these midpoint results provide a clear snapshot to help intensify momentum and spur successes going forward. These results also show that well-coordinated care can make an impact in people’s lives. Now is the time to capitalize on these early successes and eliminate the challenges that remain. The people have spoken clearly, and it is our collective responsibility to respond.



The SCAN Foundation
3800 Kilroy Airport Way, Suite 400
Long Beach, CA 90806

 Like us on Facebook

(888) 569-7226
www.TheSCANFoundation.org
info@TheSCANFoundation.org

 Follow us on Twitter